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pounds in the article under the stem. The selections of the *Reader* are, in general, excellent; from among the poets, Wallin, Nicander, Anna Maria Lenngren, Grafström, Strandberg, Runenberg, Geiger, Vitalis, Sehlstedt and Lindblad are represented by one or more selections each, while in prose the numbers are from Topelius, Hjärne, Fredrika Bremer, G. af Geigerstrom, Victor Rydberg, Melander, Tegnér, Geijer, Hedenstjerna, Starbäck, Fryxell, and Mellin.<sup>2</sup>

The grammar proper will be found to be very serviceable; being written by one to the manner born the explanations of sounds and the discussions of rules and forms are almost always correct and the matter is presented in both readable and teachable form. Some antiquated terms occur in the phonology, which the teacher would best correct to those in present usage; especially objectionable is the designation of *v*, *f*, *s*, *sj*, *tj* and *j* all as 'sibilants.' On page 2, the sound of *ä* is correctly given as that of *ea* in 'bear,' but incorrectly as also that of *a* in 'make'; in § 12 it would have been to the point to have stated that *c* is extremely rare in native Swedish words, occurring only along with *k* or *h* (in *ach*); it would have aided the student if under 48, *c*, the fact of existing cognates in *a* had been brought out. It is an error, I think, to give under 47, 2, *d*, this practically complete list of words in which the short sound of *a* is written *o*, and similarly under 47, 2, *e*, in the case of foreign words in which *a* is written *o*; only a few commonly used words should have been given. Likewise it certainly is confusing to the student to have given at all the rules, § 66, for the old three genders, when present Swedish no longer recognizes that, but is a four gender language, something which is correctly presented elsewhere in the grammar. But I do not wish to seem to find fault, for the good points of Carlson's *Grammar* are many. I regard it as a distinct addition to our helps for the study of Swedish in this country and the book ought to become widely used.

GEORGE T. FLOM.

University of Illinois.

<sup>2</sup>Some selections from the most recent Swedish writers should have been included, especially one to illustrate the remarkable prose of Selma Lagerlöf.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### GUMMERE'S *Oldest English Epic*.

To the Editors of *Mod. Lang. Notes*.

SIRS:—I am one of many who have been welcoming Mr. Gummere's *The Oldest English Epic*, just published. To me, the translation of *Beowulf* it contains, in verse, is of special interest. Can you spare me space for a word or two regarding Mr. Gummere's reasons for preferring verse to prose? These reasons he gives, but says nothing of the other side of the question. He objects to a prose translation because the original is in verse, and because in a prose translation one "can" (does this mean one must inevitably?) get rid of the style of the original, or "suppress it to the vanishing point." These reasons we may leave as stated, and turn to Mr. Gummere's arraignment of a belief, indefensible in his opinion, which he no doubt considers characteristic of those perverse enough to prefer a prose translation. "No greater mistake," he says, "exists than to suppose that the rhythm and style of these early English poems cannot be rendered adequately in modern English speech."

The word to be noted here is "adequately"; the whole question turns on that. Mr. Gummere continues, "As a practical problem *solvitur ambulando*." He probably refers to the pedestrian muse. Who will deny that a person even of modest attainments can sit down and forthwith translate Old English verse with every faithful intention into an imitation of it that scans—or even write original poems in it like Hall's *Old English Idyls*. In point of fact, the embracing of such a temptation and the actual transgression are alike only too fatally easy. At moments—all too few and fleeting—such a translator can be what, by courtesy, is called 'felicitous.' But "adequate" his translation will not be, either as regards rhythm or something still more vital, accuracy, for two main reasons. In the first place, because Modern "Old English" verse does not sound in the least like real Old English verse. It is a bastard archeological fabrication, or an atavistic degenerate, or—something else; and it never will be anything else unless, through some miracle, it should be human-

ized by a real poet or a poetic tradition—and philologists are, after all, not real poets. Moreover, even then, it would be something else, and not Old English verse. The second reason is that when a translator lays upon himself the bonds of Sievers' types and the constraints of initial rime, he limits himself pariously in his choice of available words, and cannot choose the precisely right word, interpret with faithfulness, give to the modern reader what the poem gave to the Anglo-Saxon hearer or reader. Matching letters does not conduce to precision of meaning or poetic inspiration. It made the Old English poet pad—though, to be sure, he very cleverly evaded this particular hardship of Wyrð by making his padding an artistic character of his verse. But the translator is not free to run over and select helpful stop-gaps from a stock of kennings or epic tags; he is not even at liberty to swap one kenning before him for another. This necessity to observe the letter and not the spirit tends continually to make a verse translation inaccurate, cryptic, bald, or, what is worse, artificial. It was one of several things that drove William Morris (and he a poet) to inventing his horrific pseudo-archaisms.

In brief (if I may venture to speak also for Mr. J. R. Clark Hall, Mr. Tinker, and other regrettably prosaic translators) those who have translated *Beowulf* in prose preferred prose because they preferred a medium in which they could be as accurately faithful, that is, make as "adequate" a translation in this most essential regard of faithfulness, as possible. The fact is cited by Mr. Gummere that all German translators but one have used verse. What of that? All persons of generous nature in uncurbed moments burn to rush in where even genius fear to tread. And the Germans are Titanic; they aspire to be supermen. These sinned through pride—but there was at least one just man found among them.

May a suggestion be made which might possibly transform the clash of opinions on this point into a happy concord—a suggestion which Mr. Gummere of all men should welcome? What one cannot do adequately—that is, make a verse translation—might be done by many. The world is much the richer for what Mr. Gummere has taught us of the communal origin of poetry. Why

should not an era of communal translation set in? Let some devoted soul, more valiant and more unselfish than Curtius, perpetrate for the common good a translation of one poem or another in one of our technical periodicals. Our own periodicals—for it would not do to let the Germans in on this. Furthermore it should be understood that we would give everyone in this country a chance, for we get sometimes in the habit of thinking no one exists except the Germans and our own particular University. Then let everyone, in the slang phrase, "jump on" the votive translation, rend it in pieces, and then, by a happy selection of the most accurate, that is prose, renderings offered, in as excellent and as accurate poetic phrasing as is possible, put together, somewhat like a picture puzzle but a good deal harder, an ideal translation for communal use. This could be handed down—a perfect translation, because it would have no individual author, but come out of the heart of a literate (to be sure) but homogeneous folk. For that is what philologists are. There would be no danger of petty differences of opinion or preference for one's own opinion before those of others—not the slightest. Everyone knows that there is no vanity, or jealousy, or narrow parochial spirit among philologists—or, at least, American philologists.

Will Mr. Gummere let me thank him here (not because I suppose it will mean anything to him, but in token of my personal debt) for his helpful book? I had scarcely cut the string before I was reading his stirring verse to a class, and it "went across the footlights" unmistakably. But the fact that Mr. Gummere comes almost within grasp of the impossible does not prove his point.

C. G. CHILD.

*University of Pennsylvania.*

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ON AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TRANSLATION  
OF BÜRGER'S *Lenore*.

*To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.*

SIRS:—In an interesting article on English translations of Bürger's *Lenore* (*Modern Quarterly of Language and Literature*, Vol. II, pp. 13–28), W. W. Greg has corrected some of Brandl's mis-